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A Catholic Iron Curtain Thrust

By John G. Rogers
Of The Herald Tribune Staff

A campaign to pierce the Soviet Iron Curtain with anti-Communist religious writings was announced yesterday by Icon, Inc.,—International Communication of Orthodox Nations.

The opening weapon is a 123-page, pocket-size magazine containing seven articles, printed in Russian on the left-hand pages, in English on the right hand.

Some 3,000 copies are being mailed to persons in the Soviet Union whose names were obtained from Russian emigre groups. Since they are being mailed on various days from many points around the world, Icon hopes they'll get through a relaxing Soviet postal censorship.

If they do, the Russian censorship can read such nuggets as these:

"The Russian soul never has been and never will be atheistic" — from an article by Roman Catholic Bishop Fulton J. Sheen.

"Even communism's successes are but steps toward its failure" — Methodist Bishop Gerald Kennedy.

"The Communist party . . . is powerless against the deep, and the widespread religious beliefs of the great Russian masses"—unsigned editorial.

Editor of the magazine, also named Icon, is 71-year-old Alexander S. Alexander, Russian-born, naturalized American, an engineering consultant who worked for many years in the State Department's foreign service.

He said yesterday that

though religion is suppressed in the Soviet Union, it persists strongly in the hearts of many millions, and that Icon aims to "bolster their religious leanings and clarify for them the free world's religious and philosophic principles."

Head of Icon is Maj. Gen. Patrick J. Ryan, retired chief of Army chaplains and executive vice-president of The Catholic Digest. In addition to the mailing campaign, Icon will be available to traveling Russians at distribution points in many countries. The group, which plans four issues a year, has headquarters in Washington and is non-denominational.

The initial issue cover shows a Byzantine portrait of the Virgin Mary, overlaid with a metallic gold cutout wrapper.